

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of generating a reinforced polymer, the method comprising:
 - providing particles of layered silicate and a supercritical fluid;
 - mixing the layered silicate particles with a polymer to form a treatable silicate-polymer mixture;
 - contacting the treatable mixture with the supercritical fluid to exfoliate the silicate so that the silicate particles disperse within the polymer; and
 - depressurizing the contacted mixture to further exfoliate the silicate particles so that the ~~layers~~ particles are substantially dispersed within the polymer to define a reinforced polymer.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the supercritical fluid is carbon dioxide.
3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein contacting the mixture includes pressurizing the mixture with the supercritical fluid to above the critical pressure of the supercritical fluid.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein contacting the mixture includes heating the mixture with the supercritical fluid to above the critical temperature of the supercritical fluid.
5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein contacting the mixture includes maintaining contact for between 0.5 minute and 10 hours.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the silicate particles are substantially singly dispersed upon depressurization.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the reinforced polymer includes between about 0.1 and 40 percent weight of the silicate particles.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein mixing includes shearing the silicate-polymer mixture.

9-12. Cancelled